Speech from the Throne

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Speech from the Throne

The Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC
Xwĕ lī qwĕl tĕl
Lieutenant-Governor

at the

Opening of the Second Session,
Thirty-Ninth Parliament

of the

Province of British Columbia

February 9, 2010

As we open this session of the 39th Parliament, we pause to honour the memory and contributions of British Columbians who have passed since this Assembly last convened.

Members mourn the loss of former members of this Assembly: Art Cowie, Ted Nebbeling and Angus Creelman Ree.

We recognize the sacrifice made by Lieutenant Andrew Nuttall and Private Garrett Chidley as well as journalist Michelle Lang.

We join First Nations communities in honouring the memory of Nisga'a Lisims President Nelson Leeson and the arts community who remember Doreen Jensen and Patricia Kathleen Page.

We recognize the contributions of those who helped build our province: civic leaders Brian Given, Greg Kamenka and Reg Easingwood; former B.C. Supreme Court judges David Vickers and George Lamperson; long-time Victoria Fire Captain Robert John; and 25 members of the B.C. Public Service who have passed since we last met.

We salute those who gave of themselves for the betterment of our province: philanthropist Dr. Don Rix and visionary Jack Poole.

British Columbians join the world community in shock and sadness at the devastating destruction, injury and loss of life as a result of the earthquake in Haiti. Our thoughts go out to all those lost, their families and friends.

OUR OLYMPIC OPPORTUNITY

We gather together at an exciting time in our history.

In just three days, we will host the XXIst Winter Olympiad. Then, in March, we host the Paralympic Games.

As athletes, visitors and media arrive, we welcome them all to our home, British Columbia, Canada!

This is an incredible opportunity to showcase our province and our country in all its diversity and grandeur. Our province will be centre stage as over three billion people around the world watch us host the Games.

This Friday, the Olympic Torch will complete its journey when it sparks to life the Olympic Cauldron.

As it passed through over one thousand communities in its long odyssey throughout Canada, it fired up our pride as a nation.

Some 12,000 Canadians held it high, but millions more were inspired by its enduring light. The Olympic Flame connects us in celebration of Canada, and of all the Olympic Spirit it represents.

Canada stands as a testament to the power of the human spirit, partnership and enterprise. We are a nation of promise.

This is our Canada. This is our British Columbia. And this is our Olympic moment!

Thousands of designers, tradespeople, contractors, volunteers and professionals have made this happen.

Under the unflagging leadership of Jack Poole and John Furlong, the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games team has set an exceptional example and united us in pursuit of the highest goals. VANOC deserves the heartfelt thanks of all Canadians. They remind us of who we are.

These Games are Canada's Games!

The federal government has been our greatest partner on every step along this Olympic path.

Provincial and territorial governments, sponsors and legions of selfless citizens have all contributed in this national endeavour.

To all those who have helped deliver these Games — the visionaries, volunteers, trainers, coaches, athletes, elected officials, public servants and community groups — British Columbians say thank you.

A new standard of performance has been set in pursuit of our Olympic dream.

For the first time ever, every Olympic venue was completed a year ahead of schedule and on budget.

For the first time ever, Four Host First Nations will welcome the athletes of the world to the Games.

And, we are all confident, for the first time ever, Canadian Olympians will win gold medals here in their country!

We will raise our voices in support of Canada's athletes as they strive to be the best they have ever been. Their country is with them.

Across Canada, in every community, Canadians are united by these three words: GO CANADA GO!

BUILDING ON B.C.'S OLYMPIC MOMENTUM

Every Olympic athlete dreamed a dream that seemed impossible when it was first imagined.

Their aspirations and achievements now inspire us all to reach higher.

The Olympic platform is a launching pad to lift British Columbia and Canada to new heights and new prosperity.

A new decade is upon us. It demands we leave the past behind and embrace new solutions for this new century.

In this age of relentless change and global transformation, standing still is not an option.

We must ask how we can best lead change for our children's advantage.

In the year ahead, we will build on our Olympic momentum with decisive actions that will reward the generations that follow.

A new budget will set the foundation for the province we want in 2030, with a new agenda that:

- Strengthens our economy, reinforces our fiscal framework and creates new jobs;
- Capitalizes on our strategic advantage as Canada's Pacific Gateway;
- Maximizes our potential as a clean energy powerhouse and a global leader in climate action;
- Assists and supports families with children;
- Modernizes our education system and creates new opportunities for early learning, smarter use of education resources and new choices for students; and
- Expands innovation in health delivery that gives patients new choices, that rewards performance and that secures public health care for future generations.

These priorities will help advance this government's Five Great Goals. They demand collaborative partnerships, smart action and firm commitment.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN PROGRESS

Your government is working hard to build a new relationship with First Nations.

New revenue-sharing opportunities, new reconciliation agreements and new treaties create social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people that include them in the promise of future prosperity.

The Yale Final Agreement is complete and ready for community ratification. Other treaties are on the cusp and nearing reality.

New reconciliation protocols have been reached with the Haida and six other coastal First Nations.

They welcome First Nations into our economy as true partners, with new opportunities and shared decision-making in their traditional territories.

The Aboriginal name of the Queen Charlotte Islands — Haida Gwaii — will be restored and utilized in all government documentation.

British Columbia will join with Washington State in officially naming the area covered by the Georgia Basin-Puget Sound ecosystem the Salish Sea.

The Salish Sea will not change existing names but will serve to designate the body of inland salt waters stretching from Campbell River and Desolation Sound to the southern reaches of Puget Sound.

Our government's economic mission is clear: We must foster job creation with faster approvals, lower costs, open trade and labour mobility to encourage economic growth and foster opportunities for families in every region.

The recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling on the Red Chris mine project demands immediate action to rationalize public approvals both within our government and between governments.

The government will work with other provinces and the federal government to establish one process for one project. There is no time to waste and Canadian taxpayers cannot afford the extra costs, the uncertainties and the lost jobs that are the products of the current system.

The *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* must be amended to create a unified federal-provincial review process that does away with redundancy and unnecessary costs.

Multiple governmental reviews replicate work, add cost, increase uncertainty, delay decisions, reduce investment and ultimately cost jobs.

We will redouble our efforts to conclude equivalency agreements with Ottawa to ensure environmental reviews are cost effective, timely and thorough.

Currently, over $3 billion in provincially-approved projects are stranded in the mire of federal process and delay.

This is unacceptable.

Time is money. Duplication is waste. Tax dollars are limited.

We cannot afford to hold investment and jobs hostage. Byzantine bureaucratic practices have no place in the 21st Century.

The government will fully respect and adhere to First Nations' rights to consultation and accommodation.

That essential ingredient will be complemented with a new unified process for environmental assessment and permitting in British Columbia.

The "One Project, One Process" approach will create a single framework that is timely, diligent and

science-based.

A new Investment Process Review will be launched to identify opportunities for simplifying and expediting approval processes across government.

Local governments will be asked to partner in this endeavour that requires us to look at all impediments to reasonable investment, including zoning, licensing and permitting requirements.

A joint committee on municipal property tax reform will identify specific steps to make property taxes more conducive to investment while assuring municipal services are fairly provided for all taxpayers.

In addition, government will take a fresh look at B.C.'s regulatory regimes, including the BC Utilities Commission, the BC Ferry Commission, the TransLink Commission and others.

We must identify new ways to achieve our goals at lower cost, with faster decisions and integrated approval mechanisms if our economy is to thrive and job creation is to revive.

New economic growth and smarter government is at the heart of our New West Partnership with Alberta and Saskatchewan. It will build on the success of the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement to foster free trade, investment and labour mobility across our three provinces.

We will pursue unified and mutually beneficial purchasing, procurement and licensing opportunities.

We will encourage Canada and other provinces and territories to join with us in our continuing efforts to remove all internal trade barriers.

All three western provinces contribute equalization payments to Canada. We are glad to do so. But the burdens of unnecessary protection for other regions at the expense of our provincial economies and jobs must be removed.

Airports should be open to trade, commerce and tourism through Open Skies agreements.

That step alone would add $800 million and thousands of jobs to our provincial economy.

Open Skies enable international air carriers to bring new business and visitors to communities like Abbotsford, Comox, Cranbrook, Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George and Vancouver.

As we build partnerships at home, we will build new international partnerships as well.

With California, Washington and Oregon, we will commit to a common vision for sustainable prosperity and sign new agreements to work together on innovation, economic development, ocean conservation and climate-change adaptation through the Pacific Coast Collaborative.

Our partnerships with the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, the Western Climate Initiative, The Climate Registry, the International Carbon Action Partnership and a number of trade initiatives are also yielding results for British Columbians.

A new partnership with Montana will sustain the environmental values in the Flathead River Basin in a manner consistent with current forestry, recreation, guide outfitting and trapping uses.

It will identify permissible land uses and establish new collaborative approaches to trans-boundary issues.

Mining, oil and gas development and coalbed gas extraction will not be permitted in British Columbia's Flathead Valley.

We will build on our Olympic advantage to develop other new partnerships with international investors and prospective buyers for B.C. products.

Over the next two weeks, your government is hosting dozens of events to engage more than 9,000 top-level business leaders, potential investors and dignitaries from around the world.

This is a golden opportunity to promote global investment in forestry, manufacturing, clean tech, tourism, film, entertainment, digital media, life sciences and more.

As we build vital partnerships with Japan, China, Korea and India, we are attracting new customers for our technologies, manufactured goods, education products, clean-energy solutions and natural resources.

We are expanding the markets for B.C. wood products both at home and abroad.

Our Olympic showcase elevates the international marketing efforts and the North American tourism strategy now underway.

Thanks to our celebrity partners and the Olympics, an unprecedented campaign is introducing British Columbia to billions around the world as we all proudly proclaim: "You Gotta Be Here."

B.C.'s success in public-private partnerships has also sent a resounding message around the world.

We will expand those partnerships with new P3s in transportation, health delivery, education support services, systems management and more.

Opening up our Pacific Gateway

One of our great strategic advantages is our unique position as Canada's Pacific Gateway.

Expanding our transportation and logistics infrastructure is critical to that vision.

Working with the federal government we will improve the competitiveness and reliability of our ports.

The government will encourage the new high-speed rail link between Vancouver and Seattle.

The success of the new Canada Line has reinforced government's commitment to invest record amounts in public transit, fix TransLink and get on with the Evergreen Line.

New accountability and transparency will be brought to BC Ferries as it continues improving services with new ferries, terminals and amenities.

BC Rail will be brought into government and wound down as a Crown corporation.

The Gateway Project will create new arteries of commerce and reduce travel times, congestion and emissions.

Our natural resources will remain the foundation of our economy. We will add new competitive value to them with emphasis on technology, culture, art and design.

This is an age of innovation and invention. The creative economy will shape our future.

The new film tax credit program will make us more attractive as a world presence in digital media and film.

We will build a new campus for the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, near the Centre for Digital Media at the Great Northern Way Campus. It will be a showcase for B.C. wood, natural building materials and the best in environmental design.

A new Wood Innovation and Design Centre will be created in the heart of Prince George. It will amplify our expertise and our global reputation as leaders in wood construction, engineered wood products and design.

New budget measures will make our International Financial Centre more attractive to international investment and head offices.

We will establish a National Centre on Contemporary Asia, in partnership with the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada and the Government of Canada.

We will act to make British Columbia a destination of choice for international students that capitalizes on the strengths in our schools, colleges, universities and institutions.

Productivity gains and global competitiveness are essential to improving people's take-home pay. They will be the hallmarks of the government's economic strategy.

Nothing is more important in that regard than the Harmonized Sales Tax.

It is more transparent and less regressive than the current tax regime.

It will eliminate the current Provincial Sales Tax on business inputs that is a hidden tax on productivity and will assure B.C. taxpayers the lowest HST in the country.

The HST will help our job creators compete on a level playing field with businesses across Canada and around the world.

Over 130 other countries have a value-added tax for good reason: It creates jobs.

The HST will cut the effective tax on new business investment in B.C. by 40 per cent. That creates jobs.

It will remove $2 billion in costs that are hampering growth in forestry, construction, mining, oil and gas, transportation, manufacturing and small business.

It will save B.C. taxpayers $150 million in annual compliance costs and save your government $30 million a year in administrative costs.

In addition, the federal government has provided $1.6 billion in transition assistance.

Those dollars support vital public programs.

Lowering taxes remains a core feature of this government's prosperity agenda.

The government has introduced over 120 tax cuts. Personal income taxes are the lowest of any province in Canada.

The Corporation Capital Tax has been eliminated. Corporate income tax rates and property tax for industry have been dramatically reduced. And the Small Business Corporate Income Tax will be

eliminated in 2012.

This session will feature additional measures to restore our economy and to create jobs in every sector.

A Future Powered by Clean Energy

Clean energy is this century's greenfield of opportunity.

British Columbia is blessed with enormous untapped energy potential.

We can harness that potential to generate new wealth and new jobs in our communities while we lower greenhouse gas emissions within and beyond our borders.

Clean energy is a cornerstone of our Climate Action Plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by one-third by 2020.

Building on the contributions of the Green Energy Advisory Task Force, your government will launch a comprehensive strategy to put B.C. at the forefront of clean energy development.

We have enormous potential in bioenergy, run-of-river, wind, geothermal, tidal, wave and solar energy. We will put it to work for our economy.

A new *Clean Energy Act* will encourage new investments in independent power production while also strengthening BC Hydro.

It will provide for fair, predictable, clean power calls.

It will feature simplified procurement protocols and new measures to encourage investment and the jobs that flow with it.

New investment partnerships in infrastructure that encourage and enable clean modes of transportation, such as electric vehicles, hydrogen-powered vehicles and vehicles powered by compressed natural gas and liquid natural gas, will be pursued.

We will support new jobs and private sector investment in wood pellet plants, cellulosic ethanol production, biomass gasification technologies and fuel cell technologies.

Bioenergy creates new uses for waste wood and beetle-killed forests and new jobs for forest workers.

A new receiving license will give bioenergy producers new certainty of fiber supply, while a new stand-as-a-whole pricing system will encourage utilization of logging residues and low-grade material that was previously burned or left on the forest floor.

Government will optimize existing generation facilities and report on the Site C review this spring.

It will develop and capture B.C.'s unique capability to firm and shape the intermittent power supply that characterizes new sources of clean energy to deliver reliable, competitively-priced, clean power — where and when it is needed most.

New conservation measures, smart meters and in-home displays will help maximize energy savings. New smart grid investments and net metering will provide more choices and opportunities for reduced energy costs and more productive use of electricity.

New transmission investments will open up the Highway 37 corridor to new mines and clean power.

New transmission infrastructure will link Northeastern B.C. to our integrated grid, provide clean power to the energy industry and open up new capacity for clean power exports to Alberta, Saskatchewan and south of the border.

We will seek major transmission upgrades with utilities in California and elsewhere.

If we act with clear vision and concerted effort now, in 2030, people will look back to this decade as we look to the 1960s today.

NEW SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Investment in our natural capital must be matched with investment in our human capital if we are to secure and protect our grandchildren's future.

Strengthening families is at the centre of our economic and social agenda. Government will take steps to renew and revitalize education, to assist families with children and to secure affordable health care for our grandchildren.

Education improvements will focus on the individual and unique needs of our children.

New research gives us a clear view of a way ahead that will provide for the special gifts and special needs of every child in the province.

Early childhood development creates brighter prospects for all our children.

As we help children discover their passions and interests, so we will find our future as a province.

StrongStart BC Centres will continue to support the learning needs of children and their families.

Voluntary, full-time kindergarten for five-year-olds will begin this September.

It will be fully funded and in every school by September 2011.

New partnerships with the private sector and parents will enable the establishment of neighbourhood preschools for four-year-olds and three-year-olds within communities over the next five years.

They will provide families new voluntary options for public and private preschool across B.C.

Several other initiatives will improve services for children and families.

A new Extended Family Program will modernize and improve upon the Child in the Home of a Relative program, to provide increased assistance, broader supports and new safeguards for children.

A new $180-million integrated case management information technology system will deliver better front-line services and supports to women, children, income assistance recipients and those most vulnerable.

Significant changes will be introduced to improve timely access to justice, combat crime, reduce impaired and dangerous driving and improve public safety.

Your government will work with municipalities to dramatically reduce housing costs for young families

and to provide increased opportunity for homes they can afford in existing neighbourhoods.

Government recognizes that families with children face additional costs.

A new Family with Children Property Tax Deferral Option will be provided to all B.C. families with children under the age of 18.

Those families will be given the right to defer their property taxes under a new property tax deferral program similar to the one already available to seniors and those facing financial hardship.

There are few services that can do more to lift a child to the full opportunities of life than an unequivocally great education. That is our goal for all the children of British Columbia.

Several significant reforms will be advanced to modernize our education system for the 21st Century.

New emphasis will be placed on parental involvement and on tailoring our education system to each child's individual needs, interests and passions.

New forms of schooling will be developed to provide greater choice and diversity, centered on students' special interests and talents.

Smarter approaches will allow more resources to be focused on students' learning needs while less is spent on administrative costs.

In concert with local governments, Neighbourhood Learning Centres will integrate neighborhood needs with available capital resources and under-utilized spaces.

Seven-day-a-week facilities management is fundamental to providing critical community services that meet the needs of B.C.'s families affordably.

A new Master Teacher program will be developed.

Improvements will be launched in advanced education as well. Legislation will be introduced enabling our universities to remove themselves from the government reporting entity.

We cannot let accounting policy stand in the way of our students' interests or hold our universities back from pursuing their unique areas of excellence in partnership with others.

The University of British Columbia's Living Laboratory initiative will be expanded and enhanced so we all benefit from the new products and new knowledge that it fosters.

The government will increase access to residencies for Canadians who have received their medical undergraduate training outside Canada.

Innovation is the watchword of the new creative economy that requires imagination, ingenuity and new implementation strategies.

Innovation is also central to making health care more responsive to patients' needs and more sustainable for the future.

Several innovations will be introduced to give patients new choices, to reward performance in health delivery and to protect public health care for future generations.

Innovation in health-support services, new hospitals and public-private partnerships all make our

health services more sustainable.

We must manage health care within the massive budget increases that swamp all other public goods.

Stemming the unaffordable growth in health costs is essential in meeting our obligation to rebalance the budget by 2013.

Ongoing financial discipline is essential.

It is the responsibility of all in this house to guide our economy and our public finances back to balance.

Balancing our budget is more than a financial imperative. It is a social imperative as well.

As long as we are spending more money to pay for our services than we are generating in revenue, we are living beyond our means.

We are adding to our children's debt. We are handing them our problems rather than giving them opportunity.

The tasks ahead are daunting but future generations deserve all the effort and wisdom we can muster in meeting this challenge.

We must curtail expectations of government and look for new ways of meeting our needs within the substantial spending increases already provided.

Our dreams for the future will not be won with our eyes shut, our heads down and our minds closed to today's hard realities.

They will be won with our eyes wide open, our sights set on the future and common resolve.

BUILDING ON THE SPIRIT OF 2010

Members of this Legislature are the fortunate few who have the opportunity to put in place the fundamentals for a prosperous future. This will not be an easy path, but it is the right one.

The spirit of 2010 is the promise of what we can accomplish when we put old divisions behind us and work together for the common good.

It inspires us to rise above selfishness and division, to build a better British Columbia and a stronger Canada.

We must choose a new path that meets the tests of today and shapes a future where our grandchildren will live with the knowledge that we did all we could for them.

Let us reach beyond what is imaginable today to what we want for tomorrow.

Let us prove to ourselves that we are still able to dream large and exceed our expectations.

To paraphrase Nelson Mandela, "Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great." We can be that generation.